

AMUSEMENTS and the ARTS

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Al Has Eye on Top Film Role

BY ARNOLD ZEITLIN

HOLLYWOOD—Al Hedison, a clean-cut young actor whose film future rests on the success of the movie now playing the Albee Theater in his home town of Providence, is out to bag a movie role he fell in love with 17 years ago back home at the Palace Theater.

At 29 Hedison isn't waiting for public reaction to his first, screen role, alongside Robert Mitchum in "The Enemy Below." Already signed to a 20th Century-Fox contract, he has his eye on another goal.

When Al was a student at Roger Williams Junior High School he and a cousin, Hike Hedison, saw Tyrone Power play the bullfighter in "Blood and Sand" on the screen at the Palace in Washington Park.

Hedison was fascinated by Power, the bullfights, the sand, the hot blooded ladies.

Several months ago, 20th Century Fox announced it was planning to re-make the picture in 1958.

"I want to make that picture and play Power's part," says Hedison, whose deep tan, 6-foot-2-inch good looks give him a bullfighter-ish caste.

"They're planning to star Sophia Loren in the picture," he explains. "I think they might take a chance on casting an unknown opposite her. Her name would carry the picture. Of course, if they want a big name for the male lead, I'm a dead duck. But I have a chance if they want an unknown."

Al, with one off-Broadway play and one movie behind him, is as unknown as they come. But he is an unknown with a plan. Here are the steps he's taken to secure the role of the melancholy matador.

He buttonholed Buddy Adler, 20th's executive director, and pestered the studio chief until Adler promised, "We'll give you a test before we cast the picture."

He found Pat Cunningham, an American bullfighter, and cajoled him into providing bullfighting lessons. Hedison spends his weekends at Cunningham's Catalina Island



Al Hedison: They didn't teach him bullfighting at Brown.

ranch learning cape movements, footwork and getting to appreciate the "moment of truth" known to aficionados.

Hedison had to let Fox moguls know he looked like a romantic matador. He took pictures dressed in the tricorned hat, cape and tights of the bullfighter. He waited until Henry Ephron, who will direct the "Blood and Sand" remake, left his office. Al talked his way past Ephron's secretary and propped his photos on the director's desk. Ephron returned to his desk, saw the photos and howled: "What's THIS?"

The secretary explained it was Al Hedison who wanted to star in "Blood and Sand." Ephron grunted and filed the information.

"Now Ephron knows who

I am," says Hedison smugly. "Whenever I pass him around the studio, I smile and shout, 'Ole!'"

Al says the thought he might get the part is incentive enough to keep him going. If he doesn't get it?

"If another unknown gets it, I'll be disappointed. I may even shed a few tears," he says mockingly. "But I'm not planning to put all my eggs in one basket. There will be other parts."

Al is the son of Albert and Rose Hedison of 750 Narragansett Parkway, Warwick. He attended Norwood Grammar School in Medford, Mass., before going to Roger Williams. He went to Hope High, sidestepped his education for a few months by enlisting in the Navy, and spent three years at Brown.

"My father wanted me to be a businessman," says Al. "I went to Brown to please him."

He went off to New York to study acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse. He won a scholarship to Virginia's widely known Barter Theater (where a ham is often the price of admission to see hams on stage).

He played a giddy young lover in "A Month in the Country" off-Broadway in New York. It resulted in a screen test and a Fox contract. In "The Enemy Below" Al plays Mitchum's executive officer; the film is a story of a U.S. destroyer and Nazi submarine stalking one another.

Al keeps his acting skill supple with sessions in Fox's school for contract players. He recently appeared opposite Leona Gage in her Fox screen test. Leona is the Maryland belle who won the Miss United States contest but was disqualified when it was learned she was married.

Al shares a California bungalow (\$150 a month rent) with a fellow actor in Benedict Canyon, not far from another Fox luminary, Jayne Mansfield. He drives a modest 1955 model Ford sedan.

For a time, his name was linked with Joanne Woodward, whom he knew in New York. Joanne since has linked herself with Paul Newman and Al is enthusiastically playing the field ("I don't plan to marry until I'm at least 30").

He is addicted to a Sunset Boulevard night spot called The Purple Onion. The club features Spanish flamenco dancing.

Occasionally a pang overtakes him.

"I'd like to go back to New York, do a play, maybe off-Broadway for 75 bucks a week (about a third of his movie contract pay). There's a certain intellectual air you find in New York, but not in Hollywood."

Then again, he says:

"Next year, I'll have a house out in Malibu. And a T-bird sports car, too."

Apparently while he's fondly recalling New York's intellectual air, Al remembers that Hollywood air smells of money.